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SUBJECT: CATHOLIC BISHOPS TELL POLITICIANS TO GET TO WORK,
HOLD ELECTIONS "ASAP"

REF: A. KINSHASA 183

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 204

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 205

[1](#)D. KINSHASA 218

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: The Congo's Catholic bishops issued a public statement on February 5, calling upon the transitional government and parliament to buckle down so that national elections can take place "as soon as possible." The statement also warned unnamed political parties against "manipulating and intoxicating" the population. END SUMMARY.

Statement

[1](#)2. (U) The Congo's Catholic bishops, collectively represented by the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), issued a statement on February 5--the day after a high-level "Inter-Institutional Seminar" on the transition and electoral process, which the Church declined to attend (reftels). The main points of the statement are as follows (informal translation):

--the current transition is the best way to establish rule of law, political stability and lasting prosperity

--elections should take place as soon as possible to allow the people, the ultimate source of legitimacy, to choose leaders and decide key constitutional questions

--there are currently many positive signs, such as a growing sense of shared national identity and patriotism, a desire among the public to hold elections, and a refusal to engage in a "war imposed from the outside"

--there are also many worrisome aspects, such as political leaders' focus on power-sharing issues instead of on the broader national interest, the state's failure to provide basic health services and education, the defiling of churches, and insecurity in eastern Congo

--the country's borders and national sovereignty are not negotiable; the people reject balkanization, occupation, and illegal exploitation of the Congo's resources

--parliament needs to quickly adopt the 2005 budget, draft a constitution that is "specifically Congolese," and should not give itself the "luxury of taking a vacation" while the country is in turmoil

--the government should speed up military integration, and "show through concrete action its political will to hold elections" and respect the agreements that ended the war

--members of the international community are to be thanked for their support, but should ensure that their representatives in the Congo act ethically and transparently

--political parties are committing a serious offense if they "manipulate and intoxicate" the people, and should favor dialogue and negotiation as a means of resolving crises

--the Congolese people should develop a culture of "law, justice and equality," learn republican and democratic values, and accept responsibility for their own future; they should also refrain from pillaging and profaning churches and cemeteries

COMMENT

[1](#)3. (SBU) The message puts additional pressure on the political class to bring the transition to an eventual close. At the same time, it distances the Catholic church from the transitional government, in an apparent attempt to deflect criticism fueled by the UDPS and other opposition figures. These have charged, inaccurately, that because the head of the Independent Electoral Commission is a Catholic priest, it means that the church is intimately involved with the electoral process, including any possible delay in elections. END COMMENT.

[1](#)4. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.

